



Responsive Economic Assistance to Conflict-affected Households (REACH)

Funded by USAID/ Food for Peace (FFP)

Forth Quarterly Report

July 1 – September 30, 2015

Project Summary:

Award Number:

AID-FFP-G-15-00002

Start Date: October, 30, 2014

End Date: October 30, 2015

Report Date: October 30, 2015

Total Award: \$3,915,000

I. Program Overview

The ongoing humanitarian insecurity in northeast Nigeria caused by Boko Haram and the counter insurgency continues to create an urgent humanitarian situation in the country. According to the most recent published figures over 2.1¹ Million people are displaced and the majority of them are women and children adding to the vulnerability of the affected population. This continues to contribute to disrupted livelihoods, reduced household income, and an increased risk of food insecurity². Gombe state continued to receive some reported numbers of internally displaced persons displaced from Borno.

To address the ongoing situation of displaced and vulnerable resident households, the *Responsive Economic Assistance to Conflict-affected Households (REACH)* project continues to support food needs of both IDP and vulnerable host community members through monthly voucher-based distributions. It is estimated that the project will benefit 28,700 individuals on a monthly basis for the duration of 9 months.

II. Quarter Executive Summary

The quarter under review witnessed increased numbers of IDPs - over 2.1 million³ leading to increased humanitarian needs for food support. This primarily is attributable to the recent spike in attacks by Boko Haram in the form of suicide bombings, as well as mildly improved access to some of the affected areas. The FEWSNET report for August 2015, predicted that the 2015/2016 harvests will be well below average for the third consecutive year as conflict continues to inhibit agricultural activities. In addition, and as a result of the delayed start of rains, the lean season has extended through the end of the quarter, affecting over 3 million people identified to be food insecure.⁴ Toppled with the recent flooding, which also affected some of the intervention areas, crops were destroyed as reported by State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA).

¹ IOM displacement tracking matrix – September 2015

² Fewsnet Food Security Outlook – April to September 2015

³ IOMs Round V Displacement Tracking Matrix

⁴ Fewsnet Food Security Outlook April to September

The insurgency undermined both production and transportation of food commodities and contributed to the increase in prices of staple food. There remains pressure on food security particularly within the host communities where over 92% of the IDPs are residing. Meanwhile, related to nutrition, a reported 1.5 million people are in need, including malnourished children under five and pregnant and lactating women. In line with Mercy Corps' intervention, key recommendations related to food security⁵ included the provision of direct food support for the next 6 months, cash transfer to enable IDPs and host community to access food in the markets and support nutrition communication for behavioral change.

Mercy Corps continued delivering its assistance as funded by the REACH program and a summary of the main activities is included below. Ongoing food assistance was implemented in conflict affected populations, to both IDPs and host community in the form of monthly electronic vouchers. Within the quarter, a total of 4,365 beneficiaries were targeted with 3 rounds of assistance. Concurrently, piloting of the voucher for work activities was initiated and included the registration, selection and verification of beneficiaries to be targeted, provision of the materials and tools required, preparing the community management committees and implementation of activities across all 12 intervention communities. Hygiene awareness and nutrition messaging continued to be delivered alongside the food assistance activities through the established mother support groups. Complementary recipe preparation activities were conducted as a means to promoting healthier feeding habits that maximize on existing and available resources.

III. Security Context, Situation Overview and Operational Summary

Security: While the previous quarter witnessed a relatively calm post-election period with limited security incidents; the quarter under review came as a reminder of the ongoing conflict and the reach of the insurgency. Gombe state experienced suicide bombs during the month of July: on 16 July 2015 (evening of Fitr and end of Ramadan) two bombs went off in Gombe central market resulting in over 50 casualties and several injuries, while on 22 July 2015 less than a week later two twin bombs went off around the city specifically in publicly crowded location including the mosque and motor parks. In addition a re-emergence of the Kalare group, a group of uncontrolled young armed men was noted creating an environment of added insecurity and risk. As a result of the above mentioned incidents, Mercy Corps' approach was based on the individual events and in both bombing cases, staff were limited to desk work and activities were reduced in terms of community presence without any significant effect on the timeline of implementation. In addition, Mercy Corps organized review meetings with all stakeholders (community leaders, beneficiaries, and volunteers, local actors) to discuss and suggest revisions to program implementation strategies in an effort to mitigate risks and ensure continuity of assistance delivery.

Population movements: A reported increase in IDP numbers from 1.3 million⁶ to 2.1 million⁷ during the reporting quarter can be mainly explained by the intensification of attacks carried out by the insurgents as well as improved access to some of the affected states. Gombe state in particular did not witness a high movement rate especially that most IDPs come from Borno and Yobe states where return is not an option yet due to high security risks, restricted access and limited to non-existent resources and assistance.

Markets: Most markets in the northeast remain closed or with minimal or restricted trade activities. Retail prices of staples for the area are higher than markets in other states. Generally markets are

⁵ Food and Nutrition Security and Livelihood assessment report (FAO)

⁶ IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix Round IV

⁷ IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix Round V

functioning below normal and suicide bomb attacks on market spaces inhibit free trading and affect household income generating activities including petty trading which is important during the lean periods. In addition, food prices are relatively high therefore limiting access and increasing the burden on households. Agricultural production in the last two seasons, including the dry-season production was well below average, reducing food availability, and thus increasing the length of the lean season. For the quarter in review, the exchange rate has remained relatively stable and this allowed Mercy Corps to conduct the market price analysis resulting in the conclusion that current food basket value is within target.

Operations: The quarter under review witnessed an expansion for the operations of Mercy Corps to better align with additional funding mechanisms to provide much needed assistance to vulnerable populations. As Mercy Corps' presence grows to meet the demanding needs of the populations displaced, we have adjusted operations to become more strategic and efficient. We are managing more programs with diverse funding and have aligned staff and opened a new office. The expansion includes additional sectors for provision of assistance to conflict affected populations, increased logistics, operational and human resources, geographical expansion within Gombe state to new LGAs with high IDP concentration, as well as into central Adamawa state. Overall, the team consists of 37 nationals and one international staff member. Costs for all personnel and support units are being shared to current programs based on the level of effort attributed to each.

Humanitarian Coordination: Mercy Corps continues to maintain a participatory role and contributes to all humanitarian coordination groups. In Abuja, ongoing participation within the sector working groups, Humanitarian Country Team (HTC) and INGO forum ensure collaboration at all levels with all stakeholders. At the state level, Mercy Corps continues to maintain bilateral relations with relevant parties and ensures participation in state working groups. Coordination with both Stated Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in Gombe and Adamawa as well as various LGA heads of office and other relevant stakeholders through monthly reports following the signature of a memorandum of understanding with the state.

Staff Development: Staff members of the humanitarian team attended the following training and workshop.

- Geographical Information System (GIS) and data analysis training organised by UNICEF in September 2015;
- Sphere, Protection and Accountability workshop organised by Mercy Corps

IV. Project Performance

Unconditional Cash Vouchers

OBJECTIVE 1.1: 4,100 IDP and host households purchase nutritious food that meets the needs of all household members including women, adolescent girls and young children, using food vouchers			
INDICATORS	TARGET	PROGRESS (Q4)	COMPLETION
Indicator 1.1a: # of recipients targeted and reached (disaggregated by sex and age: 6-23 months, 23-59 months, 5-18 years, and ≥18 years of age)	Households: 4,100 Individuals: 28,700	Households: 4,269 Individuals: 29,883	100%
Indicator 1.1b Actual cost per beneficiary sub-sectors activities	9,600NGN \$60	9,600NGN \$48	100%
Main activities planned for Quarter 4	Progress during reporting period		
<i>Food assistance</i>			
❖ Monthly transfer to e- cards	❖ 3 rounds of monthly transfers completed		

❖ Review of target beneficiary numbers	❖ Consolidation of paper vouchers and e-vouchers completed. Final targets calculated.
❖ Revision of food voucher value	
<i>Vouchers for work (VFW)</i>	❖ Market price assessment conducted
❖ Training of project management committees	❖ Harmonization exercise with INGOs completed
❖ Registration of beneficiaries for VFW	❖ 12 Community management committees formed and trained
	❖ Registration of around 600 beneficiaries completed, selection completed for 300 beneficiaries and verification conducted
❖ Purchase of materials for VFW implementation	❖ Procurement of materials, tools and 50 economic, 50 fruit trees for each of the 12 communities
❖ Kickoff of activities	❖ 12 tree planting activities started in intervention communities engaging 300 individuals
<i>Nutrition</i>	
❖ 2nd phase of mother support groups to be created in 12 communities	❖ Complementary recipe preparation activity for 240 women in the 20 support groups
❖ Formal linkages to C-MAM centers	❖ CMAM centers mapping completed
	❖ Linkage efforts to Unicef ongoing

Food assistance

The previous quarter reported delivery of food assistance to a total of 4,365 households in three consecutive rounds. The need for revising the timeline for delivery of food assistance to the targeted beneficiaries, as well as a review of the registration database to identify the status of beneficiaries receiving aid was also highlighted. To that end, the result of the review exercise concluded that out of the 4,365 households who received the assistance, 4,269 actually benefited from the assistance. The difference of 96 households who had not made use of the assistance provided is twofold; potential movement, or inaccurate registration of details.

In addition, a no cost extension request was submitted, allowing Mercy Corps to continue scale up of activities to provide an additional two months of food rations to the existing caseload of 4,100 beneficiaries for the months of January and February 2016. If approved, Mercy Corps is prepared to provide six months of food rations to an additional caseload of 1,100 new beneficiaries starting November 2015 and ending April 2016, which should bridge the gap between the extension and REACH 2.

Overall and including the current reporting quarter, a total of 4,269 households have been reached and received monthly food vouchers. The table below illustrates the total target reached with the allocation of number of rounds.

Total rounds received up till 9.30.15	Total number of HH reached	Number of rounds of vouchers remaining
5 rounds	1046	This caseload will receive 3 more rounds as per agreed target
6 rounds	337	This caseload will receive 2 more rounds as per agreed target
7 rounds	2422	This caseload will receive 1 more round as per agreed target
8 rounds	464	These beneficiaries have completed the full cycle of assistance
Grand Total	4269	

Vouchers for Work

The previous reporting quarter highlighted participatory community discussions that were held with all 12 intervention communities around the voucher for work component to present activities. These discussions explained and subsequently identified community activities that would engage both host and IDPs communities in an effort to develop a foundation for further economic responsiveness. Mercy Corps will engage program participants in community rehabilitation projects that will contribute to strengthening local livelihoods and mitigating the risks of potential tensions resulting from the strain of the extended period of displacement. As a result of the discussions, 12 project management committees were established within each community comprising 7 members to manage the implementation of the identified and approved activities. Within the reporting quarter and pursuant to the development of the detailed project proposals and market survey to identify cost of materials and tools required; the pilot project of economic and fruit tree planting was launched and implemented. Below are details of the process.

Beneficiaries:

- Beneficiary registration within the target communities was conducted to identify potential target beneficiaries for the voucher for work activities. While the proposal defined IDPs as the primary target, the review with the community stakeholders informed the need to revise and engage a higher proportion of host community members to ensure sustainability and acceptance.
- A total of 507 of the most vulnerable beneficiaries were registered using this criteria: persons without means of livelihoods, people who have not been supported by another organisation, female-headed household, child-headed household, persons with disabilities, skilled laborers.
- 300 beneficiaries were selected as the target for the pilot activity.
- A validation exercise was conducted for 20% of the registered beneficiaries using door to door methodology to verify accuracy of information registered.

Materials and tools:

- Project proposals submitted listed the required tools and materials for the implementation of the pilot project activities.
- Mercy Corps procured the materials and tools following its internal and donor compliant processes for delivery to the project management committees.
- MOUs were signed along with the communities for the handover and management of materials and tools.

Activity details

- A total of 1200 trees were planted across the 12 communities of intervention. Each community had a total of 100 trees planted equally split between economic and fruit trees.
- Due to the high rate of desert encroachment in northern Nigeria, this project will preserve the constantly depleting environment and bring about balance in the ecosystem.

Nutrition and Hygiene

Hygiene awareness and nutrition messaging continued to be delivered alongside the food assistance activities through the established twenty mother support groups in the intervention communities. Complementary recipe preparation activities were conducted as a means to promote healthier feeding habits that maximize existing and available resources.

- *Complementary recipes preparation*

In order to ensure sustainability of the twenty mother support groups (a total of 240 women) in their active community sensitization on the effect of malnutrition and the benefit of quality food consumption by household, Mercy Corps implemented a complementary recipe preparation activity. Procurement of locally available rich foods to practically demonstrate how recipes could be prepared for complementary feeding of young children and infants was completed. The activity was held within the community in the presence of community volunteers supporting the process.

- *Hygiene promotion*

As part of continued effort to ensure that nutrition messaging and knowledge of good hygiene is sustained within the communities, during the complementary recipe preparation activity key messages on personal and environmental hygiene were outlined. The women members of the groups carried along the messages to their communities and houses to sensitize at scale the importance of hand washing before feeding and the need to always maintain good hygiene practices during food preparation.

V. Monitoring and Evaluation

M&E activities for the quarter under review included beneficiary lists validation, consolidation of the database master list for voucher distributions, post-distribution monitoring, market transaction monitoring, complaints and feedback loop.

The table below illustrates the number of monitoring activities conducted in the quarter under review.

	Monitoring Activity	# of monitoring interventions	% of total benef served in Q4
1	Post-Distribution Monitoring	240	11.0%

In addition to the above, 11 transaction monitoring activities were conducted to ensure quality service being provided by the vendors to the beneficiaries and inform the need for any revisions to the approach.

The community feedback mechanism carried out through the use of the hotline, resulted in the compilation of categories of feedback including, but not limited to, technical issues arising from the use of the e-vouchers and electronic platform as well as requests for assistance beyond or in addition to food security. A total of 67 feedback communications were received for the quarter under review. Community appreciation of the assistance provided, as well as methodology is also gathered through the feedback mechanism.

V. Security

In response to the security context described above, Mercy Corps' security protocols were revised to update risks and mitigating measures. Generally the realization of the need to have dedicated security analysis, response to safety and security issues as they arise and an immediate reaction to security needs; led to the decision of revising the working structure and defining the scope of work for dedicated security and safety resources.

V1.Challenges

The overall program implementation is on track and within target, few challenges are encountered and plans for addressing them are being developed.

- Certain expectation from host community members to receive additional assistance in proportion to the assistance being provided to IDPs. Recognition of the exhaustion of resources within the host communities and the understanding of the need for taking a “Do No Harm” approach is guiding Mercy Corps’ review and redesign of the activities such as the voucher for work projects to fold in host community members as a key target for sustainability and acceptance.
- The ongoing lack of adequate IDP tracking by the government to report accurate numbers and movement trends continues to present a challenge in terms of advocacy for additional assistance to immediate needs.
- Weak and decentralized coordination efforts on the national and state level present a gap in the ability to share reliable information which defines needs, gaps and response.

VII. Plans for next quarter

Activity	Main activities
Food Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Continued monthly food voucher transfers to beneficiaries
Vouchers for Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implementation of 38 community activities in 12 communities
Nutrition and Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Added advocacy towards Unicef and state for provision of services to CMAM centers and identified cases. ➤ Continued awareness raising with mother support groups.